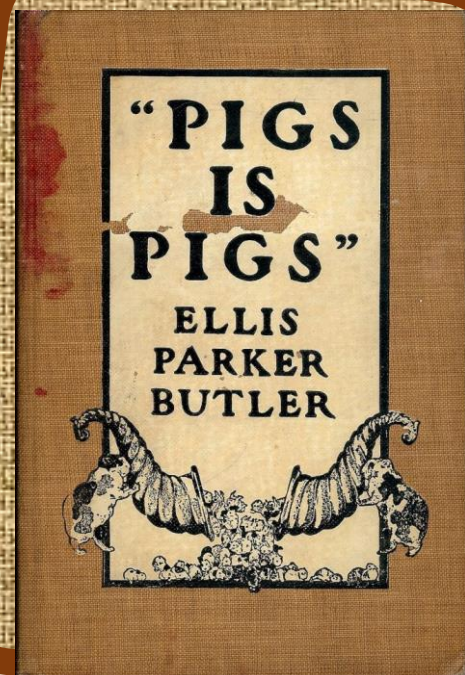


Pigs Is Pigs

by Ellis Parker Butler

Short Story Study Guide

by Margaret Whisnant



Pigs Is Pigs by Ellis Parker Butler
A Short Story Study Guide
by Margaret Whisnant

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Note to Teacher:

Pigs Is Pigs was first published in 1905, long before anyone ever thought about being politically correct. Predictably, a politically incorrect term is embedded in the story.

The main character, Mike Flannery, mistakes the term “guinea pig” to mean that the 2 animals shipped to his station are pigs from Guinea. For reasons known only to him (and the author), he settles on calling them “dago” pigs, “dago” being a common term from the time for Italian immigrants. Today, it is considered highly derogatory. For that reason, I have removed “dago” from the script. It does not in any way change or detract from the story.

Mr. Butler also used quite a bit of unusual spelling to emphasize Mike Flannery’s heavy Irish accent, which makes some of the conversation a bit confusing and difficult to read. With middle school students in mind, I have upgraded a lot of the “accented spelling” and left just enough in place to keep the fun in Flannery’s speech.

This story is in the public domain. Copies of the original are available for viewing on the internet. The copy included in this product is my edited version as described above.

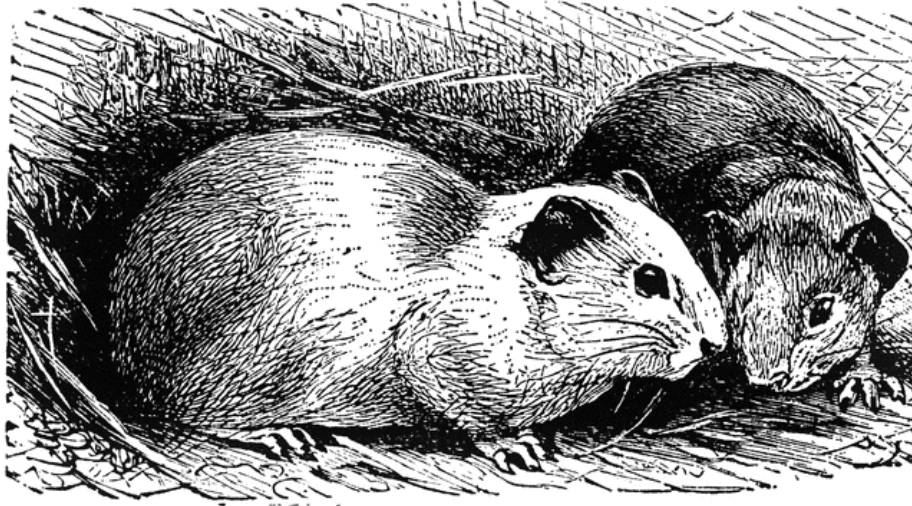
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PIGS IS PIGS

By Ellis Parker Butler

First published as a short story in [American Illustrated Magazine](#) September 1905



Mike Flannery, the Westcote agent of the Interurban Express Company, leaned over the counter of the express office and shook his fist. Mr. Morehouse, angry and red, stood on the other side of the counter, trembling with rage. The argument had been long and heated, and at last Mr. Morehouse had talked himself speechless.

The cause of the trouble stood on the counter between the two men. It was a soap box across the top of which were nailed a number of strips, forming a rough but serviceable cage. In it two spotted guinea pigs were greedily eating lettuce leaves.

“Do as you like, then!” shouted Flannery, “pay for them an’ take them, or don’t pay for them and leave them be. Rules is rules, Mister Morehouse, an’ Mike Flannery’s not goin’ to be called down for breakin’ of them.”

“But, you everlastingly stupid idiot!” shouted Mr. Morehouse, madly shaking a flimsy printed book beneath the agent’s nose, “can’t you read it here, in your own plain printed rates? ‘Pets, domestic, Franklin to Westcote, if properly boxed, twenty-five cents each.’” He threw the book on the counter in disgust. “What more do you want? Aren’t they pets? Aren’t they domestic? Aren’t they properly boxed? What?”

He turned and walked back and forth rapidly; frowning ferociously.

Suddenly he turned to Flannery, and forcing his voice to an artificial calmness spoke slowly but with intense sarcasm.

Challenge Quiz

Standards-Based Questions

_____ 1. Mixed in with all the humor, what main idea did the author present throughout the whole story? (RI 6.2, 72., 82.)
(A) the effects of stubbornness
(B) bureaucratic red tape and inefficiency
(C) facts about guinea pigs
(D) how to handle stress

2. Why had Mr. Morehouse ordered the guinea pigs?

_____ 3. What amount of money started the guinea pig problem?
(A) 10¢
(B) 50¢
(C) 60¢
(D) \$2.50

4. Explain how the name “guinea pig” led Mike Flannery to believe the animals in the crate were livestock and not pets?

_____ 5. How did the author reveal the U. S. state where the story took place?
(A) in the name of the Interurban Express Company
(B) in letters from the head of the Tariff Department to Mike Flannery
(C) in Mr. Morehouse’s street address
(D) It was listed on the bill of lading and the manifest.

Sample questions: 15 items in Full product.

Expanding Numbers

As the Interurban Express Company bogged down in indecision and red tape, the guinea pigs were busy following the laws of expanding numbers.

Use story facts and clues to determine the number of guinea pigs under Mike Flannery's care during each of the following events. In most cases the author gives precise figures. A few items will require reader inference.

Write your answers in the blanks.

- | <i># of guinea pigs</i> | <i>Story Event</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| _____ | 1. Mr. Morehouse went to the station to pick up the guinea pigs. |
| _____ | 2. Mike Flannery tried to collect \$2.50 from Mr. Morehouse for the cabbages the guinea pigs had eaten. |
| _____ | 3. While the president's letter to Professor Gordon was in route, Mike Flannery wrote a letter to Mr. Morgan asking permission to sell the pigs. |
| _____ | 4. Mr. Morgan wrote back refusing Flannery's request to sell the pigs. |
| _____ | 5. The Audit Department contacted Mike Flannery to tell him he should charge the pet rate for the guinea pigs on hand. |

Samples. 10 Items on this page in full product.

Dictionary Digs

Grab your favorite dictionary and use it to answer the following questions about some important words from the story.

- _____ 1. If Daniel is working at a **feverish** pace, then he is (A) not feeling well and barely able to move, (B) outside, laboring under a blazing sun, (C) sweating profusely, (D) moving quickly and excitedly,
- _____ 2. A **consignee** is a person who (A) works as an assistant supervisor, (B) is authorized to receive shipped goods, (C) must sign the proper forms in order to ship or receive merchandise, (D) supervises a company's legal department.
- _____ 3. Which person is *most likely* to be carrying a **manifest**? (A) a truck driver, (B) an emergency room nurse, (C) an electrician, (D) the mayor of a small town.
- _____ 4. Which word can be substituted for **reproachfully** in the following sentence so that it is changed to an *opposite* meaning?
*Delilah's mother glanced **reproachfully** at the large boxes stacked in her room.*
(A) disagreeably (B) admiringly (C) disgustedly (D) disapprovingly
- _____ 5. The *opposite* of **domestic** is (A) contemporary, (B) tame, (C) indoor, (D) foreign.
- _____ 6. Which of the following cartoons *best* illustrates a **stenographer** at work?
(A) (B) (C) (D)



- _____ 7. An **interurban** transportation system operates (A) within one large city, (B) in a single state, (C) between two or more cities, (D) between three or more states.
- _____ 8. Which word can be substituted for **relentlessly** in the following sentence without changing its meaning?
*Rain **relentlessly** pounded on the roof for two days.*
(A) ceaselessly (B) intermittently (C) casually (D) soothingly
- _____ 9. A **tariff** is a government fee imposed on (A) wild animals being shipped from state to state, (B) hazardous materials, (C) the transfer of money between countries, (D) imported or exported goods.

Ellis Parker Butler

(December 5, 1869–September 13, 1937)

Biographical Sketch

by Margaret Whisnant

Ellis Parker Butler was born in Muscatine, Iowa, on December 5, 1869, the eldest of 7 children. When Butler was six, family poverty and health problems prompted his parents to send him to live briefly with his Aunt Lizzie, who became his first writing teacher. Her talented pupil wrote and sold two stories to a religious magazine for 50¢ each when he was a child of 13.



Ellis Parker Butler
American Humorist and Author

At his father's request, Butler dropped out of high school after only one year to get a job and help support his struggling family. Nevertheless, he later credited his dad, an ardent Mark Twain admirer, and his freshmen English teacher as two of the three most important influences on his writing career. His Aunt Lizzie, of course, was the other person.

Through his teen years and into his twenties, Butler worked as an assistant bookkeeper, a billing clerk, and a salesman. Around the age of 16 he began writing humorous "Letters from a Talking Woman" and slipping them under the door of the local newspaper at night. Butler used the pseudonym *Elpabu*, but the newspaper editor eventually identified his mystery writer and recommended him to other Iowa publications. Before long Butler was writing for periodicals with circulations all over the US.

Full text is two pages of script.

Bureaucrats and Red Tape

By Margaret Whisnant

Have you ever overheard a frustrated adult trying to solve a problem with a company by phone? Was that person put on hold, transferred to another department, or disconnected? Were there forms to be filled out and faxed? Did you lose computer time to follow-up flurries of angry emails? Were your ears bruised by a barrage of forbidden mutterings?



If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions, you have witnessed bureaucrats and red tape in action.

What exactly is this mysterious combination that causes adult meltdowns? Where did it come from? Why don’t we just get rid of it?

Simply put, bureaucrats—aka *managers* and *administrators*—are the people businesses and governments hire to enforce and interpret their rules and regulations—aka *red tape*. We simply cannot get along without them.

Imagine trying to run a country or a business with no one in charge, nobody having any idea what is supposed to be done, how it should be done, who should do it, or how long it should take.

Confused emoji. . .

Full Text is two pages of script.

Thinking and Writing Prompts

At the beginning of the story, Mike Flannery is a buy-the-book station master. How had his thinking changed at the end of the story?

What story facts prove that Mike Flannery has a sense of humor? Give two examples.

Cite story facts to prove that the Interurban Express Company's Claims Department, Tariff Department, and the company president were guilty of *passing the buck*.

Mike Flannery said of the guinea pigs

They are great in family life. No race suicide for them.

His strange "race suicide" remark is a reference to lemmings, another type of small rodent. This one lives in the tundra near the Arctic Circle.

Do some research and write a report that explains Mike Flannery's comments.

As the head of the Tariff Department dictated a letter to his stenographer, Miss Kane, she *made a series of curves and angles on her note book and waited with pencil poised*.

The *curves and angles* Miss Kane wrote on her note book is a form of quick writing known as Gregg Shorthand.

- Research to find out why Gregg Shorthand was invented.
 - Who used it?
 - Find a few lines of Gregg shorthand and copy it.
 - Do people still use it? Why or why not?
-

4 pages of Thinking and Writing Prompts in full product.

Suggested Teaching Sequence

Before the Story

Informational Text:

Ellis Parker Butler—Biographical Sketch

Bureaucrats and Red Tape

Guinea Pig Q&A (This one is a matter of choice. Will be just as effective if reserved for post reading activity.)

Vocabulary

Dictionary Digs—to give students a preview of the words they will be encountering in the story.

Etymologies (Another matter of choice. Use before reading or as a post reading assignment.)

The Story

Pigs Is Pigs

Post Reading

Story Quizzes

Factual Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

Challenge Quiz—Standards-Based Questions

Activities

Expanding Numbers

Circling Around the Interurban Express Company

Thinking and Writing Prompts

Sources Cited

Informational Texts: Author's Biographical Sketch

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PetPeeps.biz
Fact Retriever.com
TheAncientStandard.com
Wikipedia

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